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John P. Gallivan
72 Westwood Drive
Wethersfield, CT 06109
860-593-4853
GallivanJP@sbcglobal.net

Thank you to Chairman Crisco, Chairman Megna and the members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony today.

I would like to offer the following in support of **Senate Bill 17**, *an act concerning wellness programs and expansion of health insurance coverage*.

It all started on April 1, 2005 when my wife Gina and I went out to dinner to celebrate the end of another week of teaching high school English. In a matter of hours, we went from enjoying an Italian dinner on Franklin Avenue to hearing a mysterious voice mail message at home, to driving to Hartford Hospital, to being told she had an aggressive form of Leukemia, and finally being told that my wife, a beautiful, athletic, 25 year old had only a 20 percent chance of making it through the next two weeks.

One of the most grueling parts of this battle for me, aside from watching Gina go through treatments, was managing our finances. Let me give you an example. Gina was transferred to Boston's Dana Faber Cancer Institute after a day of treatment in Hartford. I had to arrange and pay for housing for Gina's family and myself, and we had to pay for food as well as transportation to and from CT on a regular basis. Our prescription drug costs were in excess of a thousand dollars per month.

The next battle and perhaps the most daunting of all was finding a suitable match for Gina's transplant. Her sister was not a perfect match, so we had to look for a donor in the International Bone Marrow Registry. For months, we heard nothing, and our anxiety grew with the passing of each day. We knew that Gina's leukemia had a high percentage of relapse and without a transplant she might be back to square one. We held bone marrow drives in Wethersfield, at the high school where we both teach, as well as Worcester, MA where I grew up, and at the State House in Boston where I served as a legislative aide. All told, we added over 500 people to the registry; however none were matches for Gina. What was the difference in these drives? The ones that were held in Massachusetts were covered by insurance companies, and the one held in Connecticut required people to pay out of their own pockets if they wished to be tested. This is a shame. **It is a shame that families like mine are forced to spend an exorbitant amount of money just to find a match. We didn't want people to be hesitant to get tested in Wethersfield, so with the help of our friends we covered the cost of the drive ourselves. To add 250 people to the bone marrow registry, it cost us in excess of \$12,000. Connecticut is recognized as a leader in the United States when it comes to education, crime prevention and even health care, yet when it comes to helping to save lives by adding people to the bone marrow registry, and when it comes to easing the burden of families dealing with cancer, the state of Connecticut is found**

lacking. Today, we hope to change that with your favorable review of Senate Bill 17.

Fortunately, Gina eventually found a perfect match; a 21 year old male from somewhere in the world gave so generously of himself that Gina was able to have a transplant and as a result, her life was saved.

The goal of this bill is very simple: to allow those willing to join the bone marrow registry to do so without the additional burden of having to pay a fee. **There are many high school students of mine, for example, who may be unable to pay a fee of \$100, but who would be very willing to conduct a simple mouth swab to enter the registry and, perhaps, ultimately save a life. Paying \$100 is a deterrent, plain and simple, for anyone thinking of joining the bone marrow registry.** My goal, and the goal of those testifying here today, is to allow anyone who wants to the opportunity to join the bone marrow registry.

Every year more legislators become educated about our bill, and every year we take a step closer to passing this bill into law. I could give you a detailed account of the financial burden not having this legislation placed on and my family and me, and I can tell you about the other New England states that passed this into law and about the minimal impact it had on the insurance industry while, at the same time, having a tremendous impact on the increased number of volunteer bone marrow donors. Instead, I just want to ask you to think of the 35,000 citizens of our nation who will be diagnosed with leukemia this year. Think of the 17,010 people who were diagnosed with cancer in Connecticut last year, and think of the financial burden that these families face every day. Today, you have an opportunity to ease that burden, and to take a giant step in moving Connecticut forward in the battle against cancer.

I urge you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 17 and to take the next step and be an advocate for this bill when it comes to the floor of the House and the Senate.

Thank you.